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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2678
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 1871
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1994
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0567
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1271
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1628
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2050
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4481
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUA EJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1121
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000270

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

SES-O
AF/S FOR S. HILL,
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: EMBASSY HARARE ELECTION OBSERVATIONS: A POSITIVE
EXPERIENCE

REF: HARARE 00245

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Embassy Harare deployed 11 teams to observe elections on March 29; all reported that voting took place in a calm and orderly manner. Observer teams were generally well-received at polling stations and throughout the different constituencies, including ruling party strongholds. All teams noted a sense of excitement coming from the electorate. Election officials paid particular attention to showing that the voting process on Election Day was transparent and fair. Police had a noticeable presence in all polling stations and interacted cordially and professionally with observer teams. The teams were impressed by the apparent overall quality of the voting process on Election Day. END SUMMARY.

Observer Teams Well-Received

12. (SBU) Embassy Harare deployed 11 teams in the country's 10 provinces to observe the harmonized elections on March 29. The teams primarily covered remote rural areas visiting polling stations and speaking with the public. Each team included one accredited embassy officer, one local embassy employee and for some teams an unaccredited American, and a driver. Only the accredited American was able to enter the polling stations. Observer teams were generally well-received at polling stations and throughout the different constituencies. The public appeared excited to see and talk with our teams. And, in two locations, the queue of voters actually broke out into applause when the observer team arrived.

13. (SBU) Our non-accredited team members were able to interview voters and the general public without interference or intimidation. We heard a few isolated reports of apparent efforts at voter intimidation and manipulation, such as ruling party supporters writing down names of voters or promising bags of mealie meal if a person showed a ZANU-PF card and voted. In all cases, police acted

to stop the suspect activity. One presiding officer in the Chimanimani West constituency in Manicaland province told us that she was confident police would act properly and prevent such activities because no one at the polling station wanted a complaint entered into "the book."

¶4. (SBU) Throughout Election Day, we found the public eager to discuss election conditions, but in a show of the palpable fear surrounding politics in the country, nearly everyone we asked at the end of a discussion refused to identify their party allegiance - many simply walked away without responding. In between polling stations, mostly along dirt roads in rural areas, groups and individuals frequently would smile and give the open hand sign of the MDC. Many of those we spoke with, including several police officers working at polling stations, said the country needed "change" - indicating support for the MDC.

Election Day Voting Process Organized and Transparent

¶5. (SBU) Observer teams noted a high-level of attention to procedure and transparency demonstrated by the election officials. Polling stations for the most part were well organized, equipped, prepared, and managed. Election officials tended to be school teachers from the surrounding area, but not from the immediate school polling station; the presiding officer tended to be a school headmaster or deputy headmaster.

¶6. (SBU) At most polling stations, the presiding officers and election officials were accessible and freely answered questions about the process. Many took pride in showing log books

HARARE 00000270 002 OF 003

meticulously detailing voting activities, including the number of voters assisted and turned away. We received a cold response from election officials and police at a few polling stations, especially in the Mt. Darwin constituency in Mashonaland Central province - a ruling party stronghold and the constituency of Vice-president Joice Mujuru. However, several persons near a polling station in Mt. Darwin approached our team and thanked us for taking an interest in the elections.

¶7. (SBU) For the most part, polling stations opened on time. In one instance in the Binga South constituency in Matabeleland North province, the polling station opened at 10:45 am because the voters roll had not been delivered. By early afternoon, the wait to vote was more than an hour and growing. The presiding officer, however, secured another voter booth from a neighboring polling station and a second copy of voter rolls to speed up the process.

¶8. (SBU) At the closing of polls, our observers noted that the presiding officers showed discipline in conducting the vote count and verification. The presiding officers conferred with the other election officers, party agents, and observers with each step in the process. In most cases, the proceedings were quiet and orderly, with little or no reaction to the actual returns. In one polling station in the Bulawayo constituency, after it was announced that President Mugabe received only a paltry eight votes, everyone in the room burst into laughter when the party agent for one of the MDC formations said "as it should be."

¶9. (SBU) Our observer teams were allowed to view vote counting exercises; however, in one instance in the Chiredzi constituency, the presiding officer required the police to radio the constituency command center to seek permission for our accredited embassy observer to attend the proceedings. Permission was finally granted. In the Kadoma Central constituency in the Mashonaland West province, our observer noted that police were radioing in results to an unknown location.

A Noticeable Police Presence

¶10. (SBU) Police were present in all polling stations and generally

interacted cordially and professionally with observer teams. No overtly intimidating behavior was observed by teams; however, police presence was clear, and their authority was understood.

¶11. (SBU) At several polling stations we visited, police stationed inside had an active roll in the process beyond simply participating in voter assistance. In one polling station in the Chiredzi South constituency in Masvingo province, we observed a police officer sitting at the registration table in front of the voter rolls busily transcribing data from the rolls and the log book into a notebook. In one polling station in Binga South constituency, voters appeared to instinctively look to the police officer rather than the presiding officer for permission to drop the ballot in the box.

¶12. (SBU) A pre-election concern had been an inadequate number of polling stations in urban areas, particularly Harare. While we observed long lines in some areas of Harare in the morning, there were no lines when the polls closed and no reports of people unable to vote.

¶13. (SBU) The only significant problem observed was voters unable to vote because their names did not appear on the voter rolls. In a few polling stations, almost 50 percent of people were turned away. On average, about 15 percent were not allowed to vote. We suspect some of these individuals located their names on voter rolls in other wards.

HARARE 00000270 003 OF 003

COMMENT

¶14. (SBU) Despite inadequate pre-election preparations and sporadic reports of intimidation and manipulation, the voting process on Election Da was generally well-managed and orderly. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the pre-election environment and the post-election tabulation and reporting process. END COMMENT.

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